



Splendid Angkor civilization from the Jayavarman II to Jayavarman VII: peace, independence, reconciliation, religion, and prosperity

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អាណាចក្រក្រុងខ្មែរបានរក្សាអំណាច និងសន្តិភាពចាប់តាំងពីព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី២ ក្នុងស.វ.ទី៩ រហូតដល់ព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី៧ ក្នុងស.វ.ទី១៣។ វិសាលភាពនៃចក្រភពខ្មែរនាសម័យនោះបានគ្របដណ្តប់លើប្រទេសកម្ពុជា និងមួយផ្នែកនៃប្រទេសថៃ ឡាវ និងវៀតណាមខាងត្បូងបច្ចុប្បន្ន។ ភាពជាអ្នកដឹកនាំដ៏ធ្វើរបស់ព្រះមហាក្សត្រខ្មែរនៅសម័យអង្គរបានបង្កើតឡើងនូវអរិយធម៌អង្គរ ដ៏អស្ចារ្យនៅអាស៊ីអាគ្នេយ៍ដ៏គោក។ ព្រះមហាក្សត្រខ្មែរនៅសម័យអង្គរគឺជាស្ថាបត្យករនៃសន្តិភាព, វប្បធម៌, ភាពសុខដុមនៃសាសនា, កំណើនសេដ្ឋកិច្ច និងអធិបតេយ្យភាព។ ព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី២ គឺជាព្រះមហាក្សត្រដ៏អស្ចារ្យបំផុតដែលព្រះអង្គ គឺជាស្ថាបនិកនៃការបង្កើតអាណាចក្រខ្មែរឡើង។ ក្នុងសម័យអង្គរ អំណាចត្រូវបានផ្ទេរពីស្ថាបនិកនៃអាណាចក្រអង្គរគឺព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី២ រហូតដល់ព្រះបាទជ័យវរ្ម័នទី៧ ដែលបានលះបង់ខ្ពស់សម្រាប់កិច្ចការនគរបស់ព្រះអង្គ។ នៅសម័យអាណាចក្រខ្មែរ អំណាចត្រូវបានផ្ទេរក្នុងចំណោមគ្រួសាររាជវង្សដោយសន្តិវិធី។ តែទោះជាយ៉ាងណាក៏ដោយ ក៏នៅមានប្រភពពីសិលាចារឹកមួយចំនួនបានបញ្ជាក់អំពីជម្លោះក្នុងការដណ្តើមរាជ្យបណ្តឹងផងដែរ។ មិនថាព្រះរាជាដែល

បានឡើងគ្រងរាជ្យបណ្តឹងដោយស្របច្បាប់ ឬមិនស្របច្បាប់ក្តី យើងកត់សម្គាល់ឃើញថា ព្រះមហាក្សត្រភាគច្រើននៅសម័យអង្គរបានបូជាជីវិតរបស់ទ្រង់ក្នុងបុព្វហេតុជាតិមាតុភូមិដើម្បីឲ្យប្រទេសជាតិមានការអភិវឌ្ឍនិងរីកចម្រើនរុងរឿង។ ជាងពីរនេះទៅទៀត ព្រះមហាក្សត្រខ្មែរ ពីមួយជំនាន់ទៅមួយជំនាន់ កាន់តែមានភាពខ្លាំងក្លាឡើងៗ។ ព្រះមហាក្សត្រជាច្រើនអង្គនៅសម័យអង្គរ បានរួមគ្នាថែរក្សាប្រទេសកម្ពុជាឲ្យរាយជាអាណាចក្រមួយដ៏អស្ចារ្យ។

ABSTRACT

The Khmer Empire maintained power and peace from Jayavarman II in the 9th century to Jayavarman VII in the 13th century. The country covered the present Cambodia, and parts of Laos, Thailand, and southern Vietnam. Their outstanding leadership resulted in the splendid Angkor civilization across the Southeast Asian mainland. They were the architects of peace, culture, religious harmony, economic growth, and sovereignty. Jayavarman II was the founding king as he established the Khmer Empire. The power was passed from the founder Jayavarman II to Jayavarman VII, the king of devotees. For the most part, power was transferred among the royals peacefully during the Khmer empire, although some

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inscriptions also mention conflicts over the throne. Regardless of whether the king came to the throne legally or illegally, most of them devoted their lives to building a country with development and prosperity. In addition, the Khmer Empire gained in power from one generation to another. Those kings led the Khmers to achieving a substantial empire.

1. Introduction

Generations of the Empire Kings between 9th and 13th centuries

The Khmer empire was a powerful political entity in South East Asia, lasting from 802 CE to 1431 CE. Between the 9th and 13th centuries, the Khmer Empire was ruled by various great kings. Jayavarman II, posthumously named Paramesvara (literally, Supreme Lord), established the Empire in the early 9th century CE at Roluos, near present-day Angkor, to the north of the Tonle Sap Lake. The capital moved in the late 9th century to a site around Phnom Bakheng, the designated center of Angkor. Successive rulers built impressive temple-mausoleums and large rectangular reservoirs, or baray. At the time of its greatest size at the end of the 12th century, the Khmer Empire covered most of mainland Southeast Asia, including what is now Cambodia, much of Thailand, the southern parts of Vietnam and Laos (Higham, 2002), and some parts of Myanmar (Ngear, 1973). The urban complexes covered approximately 1,000 square kilometers in the Angkorian period (12th and 13th centuries). The city was full of temples and mosaics of mounded and moated villages inhabited by subsistence farmers and fishermen. An estimate of the city's population at its height, based on aggregate rice yields for different modes of crop production, indicates an upper limit of three-quarters of a million people (Eillen, 2009).

Jayavarman II was the founder of the Khmer Empire, and Jayavarman VII was devoted to bringing peace and harmony to each religion (Table 1). During the reigns of Jayavarman II, Jayavarman III, Yasovarman I, Suryavarman I, Suryavarman II, and Jayavarman VII, the Khmer Empire had peace, reconciliation, religious harmony, and territorial expansion. The Kings such as Indravarman I,

Yasovarman I, Suryavarman I, Jayavarman VII put a high priority on advancing the Angkor hydraulic system and agriculture. Also, the kings (i.e., Yasovarman I, Suryavarman I, Suryavarman II, Jayavarman VII) paid attention to building public infrastructure (Table 1).

There were two significant transformations in the political history of the Khmer empire between the 8th and 9th centuries. First, the royal capitals were established in different parts of the country: (1) in the northern part of the Tonle Sap Lake, the capital of Amarendraoura, (2) Hariharalaya (Roluos), (3) Mahendraparvata (Kulen); and (4) Yaśodharapura (Lowman, 2011). The Yaśodharapura or Angkor was named after its first King Yaśovarman I, and this last city was now known as mahānagara Sanskrit for "royal city"), or aṅgar (Angkor) in modern Khmer (NHIM 2018). The Yaśodharapura constituted an urban complex unprecedented in the Southeast Asian region, exhibiting immense hydraulic works and huge religious monuments. Moreover, the kings established a novel centralized system of governance, appointing royal functionaries to provinces ranging from the Mekong Delta region to the Mun River Basin (in Northeast Thailand). Yaśodharapura continued to be the capital of the Khmers with only one recognized exception until the 15th century.

Second, political innovation was also a key transformation, albeit comparatively it has received little attention. The idea of the polity was not explicitly formed by its royal center but rooted in its territory and people. In the 7th century, before the rise of Angkor, it was known as a group of cities (pura), including Bhavapura, Īśānapura, and Purandarapura. All the names referred to population centers of kingdoms that were not clearly defined, along with their outlying tributaries (Lowman, 2011). Therefore, early Cambodia was more than an extension of the capital or of a king's personality. It was conceived, perhaps uniquely among polities in early Southeast Asia, to be an extensive territorial community of shared origin. According to the information revealed by the Sdok Kok Thom inscription (K.235), written in C.E. 1052, which contains a description of JayavarmanII's life, the Khmer Empire founder

Table 1. Generations of kings from Jayavarman II to Jayavarman VII

The King	Reign (A.D)	Capital	(T)emple/(B)aray	Generation
Jayavarman II	780–834	Indrapura, Mahendraparvata, Hariharalaya, and Amarendrapura,	Prasat Damrei (T), Prasat Rup Arak (T), Prasat Neak Ta (T), Aram Rong Chen (T) in Kulen mountain, and Prasat Tor in Sambor Prei Kork (T).	Founder of Khmer Empire
Jayavarman III	834–877	Hariharalaya	Prasat Prei Monti (T), Trapeang Phong (T), Prasat Bakong (T)	The son of King Jayavarman II
Indravarman I	877–889	Hariharalaya	Prasat Preah Ko (T), sandstone cladding of Bakong (T), Indratataka Baray (B), etc.	The nephew of Jayavarman III
Yasovarman I	889–910	Yasodharapura (the first Angkor city)	Prasat Lolei (T), Prasat Phnom Krom (T), Prasat Phnom Bok (T), Prasat Preah Vihear (T), Bakeng (T), Eastern Baray (B), Thma Bay Kaek (T), Prasat Bei (T), Earlier shrine on the site of Phimeanakas (T).	Yasovarman I was the founder of Yasodharapura, and the son of Indravarman I
Suryavarman I	1002–1050	Yasodharapura (the first Angkor city)	Prasat South Kleang (T), Prasat Preah Vihear (T) in Dangrek Mountains, Prasat Phimeanakas	Relative of King Indravarman I, and King Yasovarman I
			(T), and the Royal Palace, Prasat Phnom Chisor (T), Prasat Preah Khan at Kompong Svay (T), Prasat Wat Phu (T), and West Baray (B).	
Suryavarman II	1113–1150	Yasodharapura	Prasat Angkor Wat (T), Prasat Beng Mealea (T), Prasat Chao Say Tevoda (T), Prasat Thommanon (T), Prasat Wat Phu in southern Laos (T), Prasat Banteay Samre (T), Prasat Beng Mealea (T), Prasat Phnom Rung in present-day Thailand (T).	A nephew of the king's wife Jayavarman VI and Dharanindravarman
Jayavarman VII	1181-1201	Yasodharapura	Prasat Ta Prohm (T), Prasat Preah Khan (T), Prasat Neak Pean (T), Prasat Ta Som (T), Prasat Ta Nei (T), Prasat Banteay Chhmar (T), Prasat Bayon (Angkor Thom) (T), Prasat Ta Prohm Kel, Prasat Krol Ko, Srah Srang, Royal Palace, Jayatataka (B), Prasat Sour Prat (T), Prasat Pei (T), Banteay Prei (T), Wall and Gopuras of Angkor Thom, Hospital, Chapels, Rest-houses, and constructed the Ancient Khmer Roads.	Son of Dharanindravarman II

came from Java. Although the king likely claimed to be of Khmer origin, Jayavarman II likely spent time in Java as an exile or captive. The location of this 'Java' has been the subject of academic debates among scholars. Vickery (2003) argues that Java was situated in the area corresponding to southern Champa and it had the capital in Panduraṅga. In contrary, some scholars such as George Coedes, Jacques Claude, and Arlo Griffiths claim that Java was the island which is today part of Indonesia. One study holds Java referred to Śrīvijaya, which was a sea power in the past. Śrīvijaya, however, was involved in developing trade relations with China, and it had no interest in

sending a fleet into the Cambodian interior. That would have been required in order to bring Cambodian royals to Java or Sumatra in the 8th century (Vickery, 2004). Stories during the 8th century A.D. described a conquest of the Javanese by the Khmer, but there is no record of this in Javanese history.

Building peace, independence, reconciliation, religious harmony and territorial expansion

After the death of Jayavarman I in 667, Chinese sources suggest that there were at least two kingdoms in Cambodia, known as Water Chenla and Land Chenla. Then in 802, a prince who had fled to Java came back and united both Chenlas into a single Khmer kingdom, and established his capital at Indrapura. He was known as Jayavarman II (Charuwan, 2000). Thus, the kingdom of Angkor was founded by Jayavarman II, a prince from Water Chenla who had probably either spent his youth as a hostage in Java or went to war with Java, and is considered to found the kingdom. King Jayavarman II returned to Cambodia in about 800 A.D. He met the Brahman Sivakaivalya, who was to become his life-long spiritual mentor.

In about 802 A.D. he married Dharanindradevi and declared himself a king and promptly initiated the reunification of his fragmented nation. He moved the capital city three times, Hariharalaya, Amarendrapura, and Haruharalaya. After he finally moved his capital back to Hariharalaya. Jayavarman II was successful in uniting the Chenla Kingdoms, along with a larger territory, and achieved full independence. The king also fought to build a stable nation in terms of politics, economy, and power, and accomplished the deification of the Cambodian monarchy. On the other hand, outward territorial expansion was effectively undertaken by this ambitious ruler, henceforth making the Empire a major power and multinational polity in the Southeast Asian mainland. In particular, Jayavarman II proclaimed himself a universal monarch (or Chakravatin) (Sotheavin, 2011).

There is little historical record regarding King Jayavarman III. His well-known father, Jayavarman II, was recognized in the Angkorian record. After the death of his father, Jayavarman III (835 - 877)

succeeded him and took the throne in the capital of Hariharalaya (Choulean, 1995). The king maintained the power of Khmer empire as a stable, peaceful, and prosperous country. Jayavarman III ruled from Hariharalaya located at the site of Roluos in modern times, to the immediate southeast of Angkor, and he liked hunting white elephants. In particular, the king was remembered in five inscriptions for losing, chasing, capturing, and releasing of elephants (Lowman, 2013). The date of the beginning of his reign remains a contested issue, and one text suggests that he inherited the throne at a young age (Lowman, 2013).

Yasovarman I (889 - 910 A.D) was an important Khmer king, who moved the capital from Hariharalaya to Yashodharapura, where it remained for 600 years. As king, he was able to significantly expand Cambodian territory by raising troops for war with the Kingdom of Champa. According to the Lolei inscription, in his effort to symbolically unify his realm, Yasovarman I constructed one hundred hermitages (ashrams) throughout the Khmer empire (Coedes, 1968).

Suryavarman I (1002-1050), was another important Khmer king of the Angkor period in Cambodian history. He was renowned as a conqueror and builder who greatly expanded his territorial control to the west of Lophuri, including the Menam basin in Thailand, and east into the Mekong Delta (Coedes, 1968). He was a strong and capable ruler who had knowledge of prayer, ritual, sacrifice, astronomy and ruled the Khmer empire during the first half of the 11th century. Suryavarman II united the empire internally in the face of brutal power struggles and extended the empire in the 11th century. Suryavarman II conquered the Mon kingdom of Haripunjaya to the west (located in what today is central Thailand), the area further west bordering the kingdom of Bagan (modern Burma), as well as further parts of the Malay peninsula down to the kingdom of Grahi (corresponding roughly to the modern Thai province of Nakhon Si Thammarat) in the south, in the east several provinces of Champa in the east, and the countries in the north as far as the southern border of modern Laos (Michael, 2007).

At the end of the 13th century, Angkor Wat

probably gradually shifted from Brahmanism to Theravada Buddhism, which continues to be the dominant religion to this day. Soon after becoming king in 1113, Suryavarman II led 20,000 troops and sent a fleet of more than 700 vessels to ravage the coast of Dai-Viet (Vietnam) between 1144 and 1145 (Rooney, 2001). He invaded Champa, sacking the capital city of Vijaya and defeating the Champa King Jaya Indravarman III. Suryavarman II demonstrated the wisdom and capacity to bring religious harmony. In terms of peace, he fought fiercely against the Cham army that invaded Cambodia (David, 1992), and burned Angkor in 1177.

He was a tantric Mahayana Buddhist king who reigned in late 12th to 13th centuries. However, Brahmins continued to play a role at the royal court. Jayavarman VII expanded the Empire to its greatest territorial extent and engaged in a building program that yielded numerous temples, highways, 102 hospitals (Kyle Latinis, D, Darith E, Belenyesy.K, and Watson.H (2018) and 121 rest houses. He also established a new capital in 1181, known as "Yasodharapura" or in present day as known 'Angkor Thom'. In the war against the neighboring eastern part of the Khmer, Jayavarman VII exacted vengeance against Champa in 1190, for an earlier defeat in 1177 when the Cham conquered Angkor (Maspero, 2002). He regained the capital, Yasodharapura and then he defeated the Champa army in a naval battle, according to the bas-relief on the walls of Bayon and Banteay Chhmar temples. Furthermore, by the time of his reign, the Bayon temple was the core of the third Angkor, where Jayavarman VII had erected giant Buddha statues.

Establishment of Angkor hydraulic system and agriculture

The information from Khmer inscriptions showed the hydraulic policy appeared in the pre-Angkorian period in the reign of the king Mahedvarman (K.969). This policies of extensive works for water management continued from the early period of the Khmer empire until the reign of the king Jayavarman VII. According to the inscription at Prasat Beng (K.989), When the king Jayavarman II came to the capital of Indrapura,

he ordered his officers to excavate the reservoir (Coedes, 1964). Based on the inscription from Prasat Baset (K.205) in Battambang, the king Udayadityavarman II had excavated the large reservoir to the west of Angkor wat temple called Baray Tuek Thla.

The King Indravarman I (877-889) continued the policy of his ancestors through works which can be divided into three different phases. A large reservoir was constructed under his leadership at Hariharalaya to trap rainwater. This reservoir was named the Indratataka with a total area of 300 hectares. He clearly understood that the Baray played an important role for the development of the kingdom (Charles, 2000). By inheriting the water policy established by the King Indravarman I, the later Kings in the Angkor empire further expanded water management by digging 'barays', including the West Baray or Baray Teuk Thla, West Mebon Baray, Srah Srang, and Rahal Baray in Koh Ker temple. To increase a water supply for agriculture, he also built inside the already existing baray an island temple, the Lolei, which was placed along the same in line with those built by his ancestors (Mang, 2021). He also had the Eastern Baray (7 kilometers long and 1,800 meters wide) excavated to the northeast of the new capital. Fifty years later, it was used by Rajendravarman II to create a symbolic temple which was very similar to that of the Lolei-Bakong. Indeed, he built his state temple, Pre Rup, on the same longitude of the center of East Baray, and about 1.3 kilometers to the south of Pre Rup-temple (Magli, 2017).

Suryavarman I (1002-1050) was a capable ruler who had detailed knowledge of religion and astronomy and ruled the Khmer empire during the first half of the 11th century. To support agriculture, he established the Western Baray, with an area size of 8 km by 2.2 km, and a capacity from 42 million m³ to 70 million m³. The king also improved road and irrigation systems, which supported the increasing population of Angkor and improved quality of life for the populace (Higham, 2014). The building and consolidation efforts of Suryavarman I throughout the Angkorian territories strongly suggest that the road system was established during the early eleventh century (Chandler, 1992). Jayavarman VII (1181-1201) was already a leader as the King's prince and sacrificed

his intellectual strength to bring peace and harmony to each religion. He also supported the irrigation system by ordering the creation of the Jayatataka Baray, a man-made reservoir, which measured 3,500 m by 900 m, with a maximum capacity of 10 million m³.

Building public infrastructure for national progress

Yasovarman I (889 - 910 A.D) was the son of King Indravarman I and his wife Indradevi. He was the most important king of Angkor period. During the first year of his reign, he built about 100 hermitages (ashrams) throughout the kingdom. His most outstanding achievement was to move the capital from Hariharalaya to Yashodharapura, where it remained for 600 years. The King also built Phnom Krom and Phnom Bok temples on the two small hills that overlook the areas to the south and to the east, respectively. Moreover, he probably started construction at Preah Khan Kampong Svay, and expanded Banteay Srei, Wat Ek Phnom, and Phnom Chiso. According to Inscription of Sek Ta Tuy K. 618 (11th Century), King Suryavarman I ordered the construction of 140 roads (Finot, 1928). Additionally, the inscription of Phnom Sandak (K. 194) written in 11th century had mentioned about Vrah Thnal (literary mean Holy Road or the road to the temple) which indicates an infrastructure connection between temples and linking people throughout the Khmer empire (Coedès & Pierre, 1937).

Suryavarman II (1113-1150), one of the most influential Angkor kings, directed the building of the Angkor Wat temple. He also contributed to the construction of the ancient road system, according to the Living Angkor Road Project (LARP). There are six main roads that have been identified that depart from the capital city of Angkor linking it to provincial cities and neighboring kingdoms. The inscription of Trapeang Don On (K.254) mentions the construction of causeways and the bridge to connecting roads in the 12th century. His zeal for monumental architecture resulted in the construction of many large religious monuments. He is also believed to have been the first Angkorian ruler to commission bas-relief portraits of himself on the temple walls.

Prior to becoming king Jayavarman VII (1181-1201) was already a leader as the King's prince and is recognized for bringing peace through religious harmony (Nietupski, 2019). Perhaps he was the founder of the world's earliest health system, in the Angkor period. Jayavarman VII, arguably the most ambitious of the Khmer kings, was a great builder. He ordered the construction of many large temples and other public monuments (Ven, 2012). According to the inscription at Ta Prohm temple (K. 273), King Jayavarman VII built 102 hospitals (ārogyaśāla) in diverse provinces (Coedès, 1906). Additionally, an inscription at Preah Khan mentioned that, King Jayavarman VII built 121 rest-houses (houses with fires or Dharmśāla) (Coedès, 1941) throughout the Empire because he was very concerned with his people's well-being. Jayavarman VII also initiated a network of roads linking Angkor Thom with Champa and with Phimai.

Conclusion

In Cambodian history, the kings of the Angkor dynasty are considered great leaders who enabled the Khmer to achieve an empire. The empire ruled over most of mainland Southeast Asia and parts of Southern China (Coe and Evans, 2003). Power was passed from Jayavarman II as the Empire's founder to successive kings until Jayavarman VII, considered a wise ruler. In the Angkor period, sometime the kings transferred power among royal family members, including sons and nephews peacefully, and sometimes there was a violent transfer of power from one generation to next generation. There is very little documentation on this issue. Although, Jayavarman II was considered as the founder of the Angkorian era, more evidence is required for this to be validated. When he passed away, the throne was transferred to his son, Jayavarman III, the king who loved to hunt elephants. The Empire kings, whether taking power peaceably or through force, devoted their efforts to building country development and prosperity through construction of infrastructure projects, including irrigation systems, roads, bridges, hospitals, rest-houses, and places of worship. Their skilled leadership enabled a splendid Angkor civilization across the Southeast Asian mainland. The kings were the architects of peace,

culture, religious harmony, and economic growth, sovereignty, and cultural diplomacy with neighboring countries.

In order to lay claim to its vast territory and protect what was already attained, the Empire had to be maintained by a force of arms, often clashing with neighboring Thais and Chams. Soldiers had weapons including swords, lances, bows arrows, and clubs. They also had catapults mounted on carts or the backs of elephants. The soldiers were all supporters of the king and were forced to sign an oath of loyalty to him (Tully, 29). The empire could only expand as far as its natural barriers would allow - seas, mountain ranges, and impassable jungles. These jungles and other natural barriers also protected Angkor from being easily accessible to its enemies. Water was important for the ancient Khmers and irrigation became the key to survival and development of this great empire. The Khmers cultivated rice with flood retreat agriculture, which is the practice of digging low dikes around paddy fields to trap rainwater, and using bonded fields, which is a system of embankments to trap retreating floodwaters to irrigate crops. They also built artificial lakes called barays, which translates as 'large pool' or 'reservoir'. The Tonle Sap Lake and the Mekong River also provided a waterway for trade.

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